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ENCIRCLING LINEARITY IN CARLOS SAURA'S *PEPPERMINT FRAPPÉ*

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Spanish director Carlos Saura is internationally famous for creating films where the past, the present, and the future are fused together and intermixed with reality, fantasy, and dreams. Although this practice is generally recognized by critics as one of Saura's strategies for circumventing the repressive censorship operating during the Franco era, María Delgado points out that Saura's continued reliance on non-linear narratives in his post-Franco work "indicates that his style was determined as much by a desire to interrogate the possibilities of the medium as by censorship" (375). Indeed, in an interview with Antonio Castro, Saura has been quoted as saying "Estoy totalmente en contra de la vuelta a la moda del modelo de cine americano, de que hay que contar historias lineales" (46).

Nevertheless, when we examine Saura's entire filmography of over two dozen titles, we find many works which do follow a basically linear storyline. His 1967 *Peppermint frappé*, for example, has a remarkably straight-forward plot. A middle-aged doctor (Julián) visits his childhood friend (Pablo), who has just returned home after a long absence with his new wife (Elena), a fashionable young blonde who reminds Julián of a woman he had seen once in the town of Calanda. Julián quickly becomes infatuated with Elena, but after she repeatedly rejects his advances, he takes a romantic interest in his shy and somewhat dowdy medical assistant (Ana), whom he endeavors to transform into a replica of Elena through the use of clothing and make-up. Despite Ana's submission to his demands, Julián continues his pursuit of Elena, who eventually enlists her husband's aid in humiliating him. In response, Julián invites the couple to his country home, where he kills them both while Ana destroys all evidence of the crime. The strict chronology of this story is interrupted by only two brief black and white flashbacks that are clearly set off from the primary narrative filmed in color.[1]

How can we reconcile the distaste which Saura expresses for linear narration with his use of linearity in *Peppermint frappé*? The answer lies in Saura's particular notion of linear narration, which he goes on to describe in the same interview with Antonio Castro: "Estoy totalmente en contra de limitar el cine al planteamiento simplista de contar una historia con un principio y un final, que sea fácilmente inteligible, que los personajes estén claramente definidos, y que sean fácilmente identificable con la realidad cotidiana" (46). Despite its chronological plotline, *Peppermint frappé* doesn't really fit Saura's view of what constitutes linear storytelling. It isn't simplistic and it has neither an easily understandable ending nor clearly identifiable characters. This is because Saura complicates the linearity of *Peppermint frappé* by adding two levels of stylistic complexity. First, he uses a single actress—Geraldine Chaplin—to portray all three female roles: Elena, Ana, and the woman of Calanda. Second, he establishes a series of visual and auditory motifs which introduce a strong element of circularity to the narrative. Together, these stylistic devices create an ambiguity which undercuts the simplicity which Saura typically associates with linear narration.

Peppermint frappé marks the first instance of the multiple-character casting which Saura will later employ in *La prima Angélica*, *Cría cuervos*, *Elisa vida mía*, and *Dulces horas*. In general, this casting strategy is used by Saura to reflect the subjective point of view of what Seymour Chatman calls a "filter" character (143–44). In *Peppermint frappé* that character is Julián, and it is through his perspective that the women in his life are presented. Our first exposure to Julián occurs during the opening credits, which show him clipping pictures of fashion models from magazines. It is important to note that he does not cut out entire photographs, but rather, he uses a ruler to isolate certain parts of the body—lips, eyes, hair, and legs—before pasting them in his album. He also limits his choice to those body parts which are artificially enhanced in some way. Thus, his clippings show disembodied legs encased in lace stockings, pairs of eyes with false or mascara-laden lashes, dyed hair falling from nowhere, and detached lips colored in bright red. These magazine fragments exemplify what Saura calls Julián's "obsesión por los objetos" and the "carácter fetichista" of Julián's erotic fascination for beauty products typically used "para crear una mujer artificial" (Brasó 158).[2] Because of Julián's attachment to these fetishized objects, he fails to view women as whole entities and as individuals distinct from one another. Rather, he sees all women as one generic female made of a conglomeration of parts. Saura's casting of the same actress for all three female roles visually captures this viewpoint and allows us to see the women in Julián's life through his own eyes.

In speaking of *Peppermint frappé* Saura has stated that "en el fondo, la película es la destrucción de una mujer para crear otra mujer, que es igual, pero a través de accesorios, de pinturas, de pestañas, de carmín de labios, de potingues" (del Amo 24). This process of transformation and destruction takes place through an elaborate series of props and music which recur throughout the film as mo-

[1]Agustín Sánchez Vidal notes that after finishing *Peppermint frappé* Saura lamented that he had not used color for the flashbacks in order to achieve the same kind of integration of reality and fantasy seen in Buñuel's *Belle de jour* (57).

[2]Marvin D'Lugo views Julián's fetishism as a metaphor for a chain of social repressions arising out of traditional Spanish values, and he notes that Spanish directors of the seventies frequently used the theme of sexual repression to critique the overall Spanish cultural ethos (72).

tifs. By associating certain motifs first with one character and then with another, Saura reinforces the visual equation between the characters achieved by the use of the same actress to portray them all. Furthermore, through the progression of these motifs Saura creates a circular pattern of connections which counters the linear movement of the plot.

The initial connection among the three female characters takes place during Julián's visit to Pablo's house, where he sees Elena for the first time. As Julián looks up from where he is seated, his view of Elena is cut off by the walls and ceilings surrounding the stairway she is descending. Consequently, her body is slowly revealed, part by part, in simulation of the photos in Julián's album, beginning with her stocking-clad legs, continuing with her short white dress, and ending with her platinum blonde hair. Elena's decent is intercut with a close-up on Julián's face, thereby establishing him as the subjective filter for the scene. Suddenly a sound bridge of drum music is heard, which anticipates Julián's mental flashback to the blonde woman dressed in white whom he had seen beating a drum during the Holy Week celebrations in Calanda. Geraldine Chaplin's presence in this scene as both Elena and the woman of Calanda directly links these characters together, and her presence earlier as Ana implicitly connects the two women to that character as well. Nevertheless, at this point in the narrative Ana's brunette hair clearly sets her apart from both of the blonde women. Julián's flashback ends abruptly when he is introduced to Elena. During their conversation Julián notices a scar on Elena's hand, between her thumb and forefinger, which he takes to be the remains of a blister which participants in the Calanda festival typically get from their constant drumming. Despite Elena's repeated denial that she is the woman Julián saw in Calanda, her blonde hair, white dress, and blister scar are sufficient to link the two in Julián's mind. Soon afterwards, Ana will get a similar blister between her thumb and forefinger as a result of using Julián's exercise machine. This seemingly insignificant detail constitutes the first direct link between Ana and the other women. In a telling gesture, Julián initiates his sexual relationship with Ana by kissing her blister.

As the narrative progresses, the motifs connecting Elena and Ana become more pronounced. Julián serves Ana peppermint frappés—Elena's favorite drink—during their evenings together; he gives Ana lace stockings similar to those worn by Elena during her driving tour of Cuenca; and he applies lipstick and false eyelashes to Ana's face after having seen the same type of cosmetics in Elena's purse and make-up case. When Ana comments that the eyelashes clearly look false, Julián says "Claro, para eso son," thereby reaffirming his preference for artificiality over authenticity and objects over people. These various visual motifs are complemented aurally as well. The American pop song that Elena uses as dance music during her first visit to Julián's country home later is played by Ana while she waits for Julián to finish developing the photos he had taken of Elena dancing.[3]

The motifs which serve to transfer Elena's characteristics to Ana suddenly undergo a reversal, however, after Pablo and Elena play a cruel joke on Julián by purchasing a drum and having Elena beat on it. Although Elena imitates the actions of the woman Julián saw in Calanda, Elena's black dress suggests that she is now her opposite rather than her duplicate. The next scene opens with a close-up on a liquor decanter filled with green liquid. This is the first appearance of this object in the film since on all previous occasions the peppermint liquor had been poured directly from its bottle. Right after this close-up we see Ana lying in Julián's bed with the drum at her side and a drum stick in her hand. While she sleeps, Julián sits nearby fondling the hair of a blonde wig on the table. At first glance, this seems like the aftermath of just another sexual encounter between Julián and Ana involving objects associated with Elena. But soon it becomes clear that Julián has drugged Ana with a sedative-laced peppermint frappé. After determining the soporific effect of the potion on Ana, Julián carefully pours the remains of her drink back into the decanter at the close of the scene. We next see the decanter in Julián's country home, where he is preparing refreshments for Pablo and Elena. His intention to drug the couple becomes evident when he pours a glassful of peppermint liquor out of its bottle for himself and places the decanter on the table for his guests to use. Elena comments on the beauty of the decanter before she and Pablo drink its contents and then lose consciousness in front of the house. While Ana secretly looks on from the window, Julián strips Elena of her false eyelashes and rubs off her lipstick and mascara, thereby destroying her figuratively before doing so literally in the car crash he arranges for the couple. When he returns to the house, he finds Ana dressed in white, wearing her blonde wig for the first time, and beating on the drum. Thus, through Elena's death, Ana has closed the circle of Julián's desire by becoming not just Elena but the woman of Calanda as well.

The circular progression of the motifs joining the three characters played by Geraldine Chaplin begins and ends with the woman of Calanda. Her blonde hair, white dress,

[3]Although the film merely shows Julián coming out of his office with the newly developed photos in his hand, the unpublished filmscript contains a scene showing him developing them (88–89). While so doing, Julián fragments Elena's image in the same way as he did to the magazine photos in the opening credits: "Julián toma el papel fotográfico y lo introduce en la cubeta del revelado. Al poco rato va surgiendo la fotografía recién ampliada. Un ojo inmenso, una ceja y un fragmento de la nariz de Elena. . . Julián deja de remover las fotos y se dirige hacia la esmaltadora. Levanta el mecanismo y desprende de ella dos fotografías. Las toma y las mira, acercándose al fanal rojo. Son de Elena, las dos fotografías pertenecen al mismo negativo, pero una de ellas mucho más ampliada. Las lleva hasta la mesa y allí las deja junto a otras. Son de Elena: fragmentos de su rostro, de su mano." I wish to thank Butler University for the travel grant which allowed me to consult this source.

and blistered hand immediately associate her with Elena, who shares those characteristics. The blister on Ana's hand completes the connection, and begins the transfer of Elena's traits to Ana. But once Julián's plan to kill Elena goes into effect, Ana's character becomes more dominant, culminating in her appropriation of the woman of Calanda's persona. It is important to note that the white dress which Ana wears in the final scene did not come to her via Elena, but rather, represents Ana's own direct link to the woman of Calanda, independent of Elena's influence. Thus, the white dress is the crucial element which closes the gap in the circle separating Ana from the woman of Calanda. But the network of connections does not end here. The white dress acquires additional importance when we take into consideration Julián's other mental flashback, which predates his memory from Calanda. This flashback to Julián's childhood is triggered by Elena's teasing comment that she could just as easily have married Julián as Pablo. While watching Elena play with her wedding ring, Julián recalls Pablo as a boy engaged in a mock wedding ceremony with a young girl dressed in white. Thus, Julián's fascination for the woman of Calanda has its origins in his attraction to this similarly-dressed girl of his youth. Pablo's status as the groom—of both the girl in the flashback and Elena in the main narrative—has constituted an impediment to Julián's desires. But with the death of Elena and Pablo, Ana can now assume the triple identity of Elena, the woman of Calanda, and the girl from Julián's childhood, with Julián replacing Pablo as her suitor. Although this girl bride appears only briefly in the film, her importance to Julián—as the narrative's subjective filter—makes her a crucial element in the circular pattern governing the interrelationship of characters and motifs (see Fig. 1).

Saura has been quoted as saying "nada de lo que hay en mis películas es casual. Los más pequeños detalles tienen un sentido" (Rentero 17). This contention certainly is born out in *Peppermint frappé*, where a single actress and a handful of motifs create a chain of associations whose stylistic sophistication belies the seeming simplicity of the film's linear plotline.

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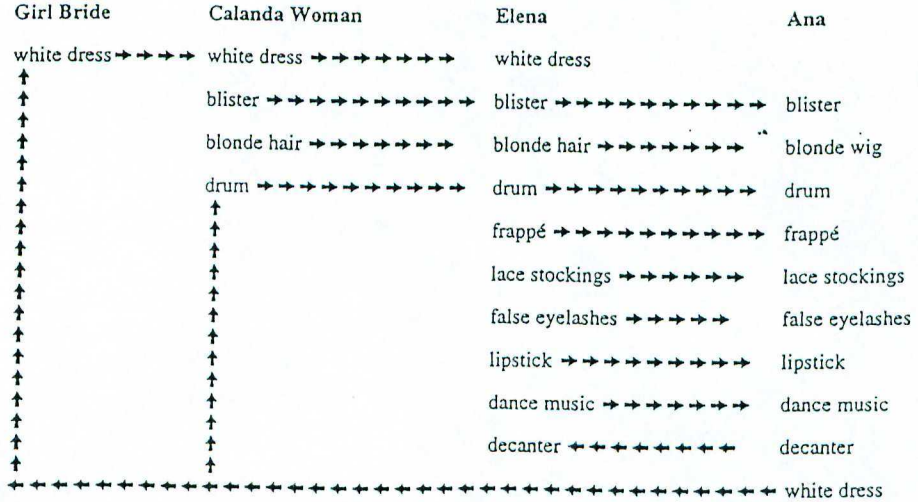
Figure 1